The faculty members of the department of special education continuously review various types of program data to ensure that 1) the program continues to meet the educational needs of teacher education candidates, 2) the curriculum is consistent with current research, best practices, and legal/educational policy guidelines, and 3) graduates have developed the skills needed to be exceptional educators. Discussions related to program assessment and improvements are held in different venues throughout the academic year including: retreats, faculty meetings, committee meetings, and ad-hoc committee meetings. A brief summary of some of those assessment activities follows.

Section 1: Program Assessment System Transition Point Assessments

Admission: Requirements for admission include a 2.75 GPA, successful WEST-B scores and an application essay. The essay section of the application is evaluated for content and style by members of the department admissions committee. Each potential teacher candidate’s entire application is reviewed by one committee member who then makes a recommendation to the full admissions committee.

First Block: The department has three courses that students take concurrently during the second quarter following admission to the special education program. These three courses have shared assignments, each of which is evaluated independently by the faculty teaching the courses. Performance-based assignments in the two content classes are evaluated using a scoring rubric. The rubric contains items tied specifically to the objectives of each of the two content courses. Ratings on items related to lesson planning and instruction are averaged and reported as a single performance score for SPED 420. Ratings on rubric items measuring classroom management skills are averaged and reported as the performance score for SPED 460. Candidates are observed on at least two formal occasions while teaching in a P-12 practicum setting. Rubric scores across observations are averaged to create the performance score for the practicum SPED 440. All course instructors receive training in use of the rubrics to ensure inter-observer reliability of the ratings.

Reading Block: Reading block consists of a set of two courses, one content course and a P-12 practicum. A rubric specific to reading instruction was developed for the two course reading block. Observations of teaching are videotaped and later scored. Feedback on the observations is given verbally and in writing. A small group of teacher candidates meets with the course instructor to review their videotapes and obtain instructor and peer feedback. The practicum score is calculated by averaging the rubric scores from the video-taped observations. A score summarizing performance on in-class assignments is calculated for the content course.

Final block: Final block includes three courses, two content courses and one P-12 practicum. A single score, based on the rubric for the program’s culminating project, is reported to capture performance in the two content courses. For this project, each teacher candidate selects or is assigned a student in
his or her practicum setting in need of academic intervention. The candidate conducts assessments, designs an intervention, and monitors the student’s progress for an academic quarter. This project is presented to faculty, other teacher candidates, and members of the community. Three faculty members independently evaluate each candidate’s intervention and presentation and assign a score using a rubric. All course instructors have been trained to reliability score performance in the final presentations. The scores of the three evaluators are then averaged to create the final course score.

Student internship: Each teacher candidate is observed weekly by a supervisor and his or her cooperating teacher and is provided with feedback about his or her performance. The supervisor conducts formal evaluations at midterm and at the end of the internship in collaboration with the teacher candidate and cooperating teacher. Both scores are reported for program evaluation.

Section 2: Use of Data for Improvements of Programs and/or Operations

Program Improvement

• Diversity of students:

Reports regarding diversity defined by ethnicity that are generated by WCE show that between 86% and 89% of candidates across programs enrolled in Special Education identify themselves as Caucasian. A total of 6% identify themselves as Hispanic. The remainder are non-Hispanic, including Asian, American Indian, and Black or African American.

The Department of Special Education and Education Leadership believe that diversity is more than ethnicity, including, for example, gender, sexual orientation, and disability.

Discussions have occurred in programs in the Department about how best to document the variety of diversity, attract candidates to the program from diverse backgrounds, and how best to support all candidates.

WWU provides a unique opportunity to identify and recruit faculty for department positions who represent diversity in the broad sense and who emphasize research agendas that focus upon diverse populations. Faculty in the SPED program will be availing themselves of exploring this opportunity during 2014 because of the need for new tenure-track faculty, especially faculty who specialize in special education as well as diversity.

• Internal Assessments:

Results of Program Level Assessments for the past year indicate that that between 95 – 100% of candidates scored at or above standard on all program assessments. While this score appears to support the quality of the program, the types of assessments are suspect.

Currently internal assessments for the program have come into question as to whether they measure what they purport to measure.

In order to address the quality of assessments, faculty have undertaken curriculum alignment. As part of this process, they are identifying gaps in the program that need to be addressed in order to meet existing and proposed new standards from a variety of external organizations and the State. In addition, they are in the process of examining
outcomes and determining assessments that more closely document the quality of teacher preparation across all domains. This project is expected to be completed Spring 2014

• External Assessments

The final Special Education Handbook for the edTPA has been recently adopted. Because of the delay in this adoption, the Special Education Program has not had a clear direction for the preparation of candidates. The recent scores of 3 candidates from Spring 2013 and of 15 candidates from Fall 2013 have provided some guidance to the needs of students and how the Program might structure preparation. The Program examined data from the assessment, identified a variety of resources, and began a process to support candidates. Some of the process that will be examined and perhaps implemented in 2014 are the following: (a) meeting with other departments who are further along in the process, (b) infusing multiple courses with specific tasks to be completed in relation to the assessment, (b) identifying one course that can provide further information and additional practice, (c) identify one faculty member in the Special Education Program who can become an expert in the assessment, (d) have multiple faculty attend workshops and trainings to become scorers for the assessment to better understand the assessment and design supports for candidates.

Data from the West-E show that Candidates are well-prepared for content endorsements. The average scores of candidates in Special Education are above the State average. Results have been shared with the faculty.

Improvement of operations

• Advising

During 2012 - 2013, The Special Education Program participated in the WCE Advising Project. Candidates in the program were surveyed as to their experience with advising. It was found that student satisfaction with the advising process was high. One problem, however, that students did report is the difficulty of accessing classes outside of the Department. A sequence of courses was redesigned to establish more of a cohort model in order to more accurately predict number of candidates who will be enrolling in future courses, especially courses across campus. This process facilitates better communication with other colleges and departments that serve our population and provides more timely and reliable information for the purpose of scheduling.

• Program Coherence

Faculty examined consistency and coherence of procedures for the program across multiple sites, especially consistency for adjunct and non-tenured track faculty. For example, faculty examined course syllabi and found that grading scales varied for the same courses. They agreed to adopt one grading scale that all faculty will follow, thus providing some consistency and continuity for students and oversight by the department to ensure quality of academic experience.